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W(hole)istic Education: Thinking the Psychic Revolution in Question

Lionel Claris

Two years ago, I contributed to a series of emails over several weeks amongst 150 Krishnamurti ‘educators’ around the world. This online ‘dialogue’ had been ignited by the question of what K would call his schools today.¹ After reading it all I felt compelled to offer a different reading of the relationship between K and ‘alternative education’ in general, and ‘holistic education’ in particular, because the latter was largely uncritically equated to K’s teachings. I will make the case it is essential to conceive of Krishnamurti education as distinct because its intent is ultimately of an altogether different nature.²

My connection to the Krishnamurti world is that I had been incredibly fortunate to be a student at Brockwood Park School and, after training to be a teacher, had returned to be a staff member for a couple of years. Since I left I have been working on a Ph.D. in philosophy and ‘critical thought’. As such, in my contribution my aim was to *deconstruct* the notion of ‘holistic education’ as I investigated the meaning of the related notion of ‘wholeness’. As you’ll see, I do so in the context of Krishnamurti’s educational vision and consider that its essence lies in its concern

¹ It had been initiated by Friedrich Grohe as part of his longstanding effort to help link K educators worldwide.

² A much shorter version was first published in *Friedrich’s Newsletter* in 2020, and another short iteration was published in the 2023 *Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools*.

with an *inner revolution*, which has come under question in recent times.³

While there were some favorable responses to raising the question of ‘psychological revolution’, there were also some strongly critical counter-arguments.⁴ The essence of which was that in that respect K education has been a failure. All of this led to my being invited to write a revised and extended version with the hope that it might be useful to K educators who find it important to consider what Krishnamurti really meant by such a revolution.

i. Is Krishnamurti’s Pedagogy Holistic?

To start with it seems that *before* attempting to answer the question of ‘what K would call his schools today’ we must clarify what K might have meant by ‘holistic’. My sense is that it is a jump to assume that K’s use of the term is the same as in ‘holistic education’, even though there is obviously some connection between them. The point is not only to see where the two overlap but, more importantly, *where they do not*. Despite the fact that Krishnamurti does use the word ‘holistic’ from time to time—and the word ‘whole’ much more often—it seems to me critical to question what is meant by ‘wholeness’. For I fear that such a notion may become all too idealistic, forgetting the quality of ‘the unknown’ that should arguably be associated with it.

In his comprehensive study *Holistic Education*, Scott Forbes (former director of Brockwood Park School) analyses six thinkers in order

³ This led me in the conclusion of this version to give a brief critical assessment of one of the most forceful strikes against it in recent memory: the article published in *The India Forum*, *Silences of Jiddu Krishnamurti* (2021) by TM Krishna.

⁴ Suprabha Seshan’s contributions in particular echoed that sentiment most directly. See the 2020 issue of *Friedrich’s Newsletter*.

to present its 'ideas and nature'. Significantly, Krishnamurti is not one of them. In fact, the reader is left to make the potential connections between K and 'holistic education' pretty much on his or her own. So much so that it is often unclear whether and how there may be a direct link between the two. Even if K is mentioned only a couple of times throughout the book, it is an informative read for delving into the theories of learning behind 'holistic education'.

Particularly helpful are the sections entitled 'What needs to be learned', which delineate what is important in terms of learning for each of these educators. Such a section on K could have been invaluable—though it seems it would be more appropriate here to talk about what needs to be *unlearned*. I am aware that Oxford University where Scott Forbes did his research would not let him write about Krishnamurti because he was already knowledgeable in this work and a doctorate requires new scholarship. Still, it seems it is a missed opportunity since comparing and contrasting Holistic Education thinkers and Krishnamurti would have *also* arguably constituted *new* academic erudition.

We can here only begin to touch on some of what this research might have revealed. Yet by cutting to the essentials maybe that is enough for our purposes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, none of these thinkers seem to have been interested in a *psychic's revolution*. Of course, 'holistic education' is intent on what it calls 'ultimacy', but even in the psychological context—for example in Abraham

⁵ I use this term as synonymous with 'psychological' or 'mental'. Even though I do so in part because I was looking for a term that, unlike these other two, includes a 'spiritual' dimension, I am not at all using 'psychic' to mean anything 'supernatural' or 'parapsychological'. I mean *spiritual* in the sense of something *sacred* that Krishnamurti is describing without the undertones of organized religions. Ultimately the enduring question is that of the best words to use contextually that direct us best towards the unknown quality they *all* initially had. After all, even the affirmation of the 'supernatural' typically ends up unwittingly having more to do with the known—even if seemingly exotic or strange—than *the* unknown around which any structure of the known is constructed.

Maslow's notion of 'self-actualization'—it appears to be in many ways at odds with K's questioning of the self. Could it be, then, that this *inner revolution* is the distinctive and central piece of a K education? After all, Krishnamurti did publish a book entitled 'The Only Revolution' (1969) in which such an 'interior change' is front and center.

One of the crucial questions is how this 'revolution' relates to the idea of 'wholeness'. My source of inspiration in offering a possible answer is one of K's most concise and notable statements on education: 'The Intent of the Schools'. I was lucky to come across it when I was a student at Brockwood, and I was happy to read it again in Friedrich's *The Beauty of the Mountain*. In the last paragraph, K concludes with the clarity that is one of his trademarks:

"This whole movement of inquiry into knowledge, into oneself, into the possibility of something beyond knowledge, brings about naturally a psychological revolution, and from this comes inevitably a totally different order in human relationship, which is society. The intelligent understanding of all this can bring about a profound change in the consciousness of mankind."

So, it is *not* an 'alternative' that K wants to provide in his schools, but perhaps *the* alternative to what schools are usually assumed to be about: *knowledge*. What could be *the* alternative to knowing? That is, *the* alternative to conditioning that accompanies any accretion of knowledge. While Krishnamurti's views may seem at first to align with the broad definition of 'holistic education' as *the development of the whole person*, it is a stretch to presume that such development leads to the kind of *psychological revolution* K is explicitly after.

Allow me to offer a brief reading of the five previous paragraphs of that Krishnamurti educational statement in order to clarify what he might have meant by ‘whole’ and ‘holistic’. Let us consider the first two paragraphs:

“It is becoming more and more important in a world that is destructive and degenerating that there should be a place, an oasis, where one can learn a way of living that is whole, sane and intelligent. Education in the modern world has been concerned with the cultivation, not of intelligence, but of intellect, of memory and its skills. In this process little occurs beyond passing information from the teacher to the taught, the leader to the follower, bringing about a superficial and mechanical way of life. In this there is little human relationship.

Surely a school is a place where one learns about the totality, the wholeness of life. Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the taught explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their behaviour. From this they begin to discover their own conditioning and how it distorts their thinking. This conditioning is the self to which such tremendous and cruel importance is given. Freedom from conditioning and its misery begins with this awareness. It is only in such freedom that true learning can take place. In this school it is the responsibility of the teacher to sustain with the student a careful exploration into the implications of conditioning and thus end it.”

What is the ‘wholeness of life’ that K is talking about here? Perhaps the most problematic assumption amounts to the anthropomorphism of wholeness. So that holistic education tends to reduce the wholeness in question to ‘the whole person’. The point, on the contrary, seems to be the active questioning of such a construct. To do so, K is here emphasizing *the relational aspect* of the process of what we might call the *deconditioning* of the person.

As both David Bohm and Krishnamurti were fond of doing, it is sometimes enlightening to consider the more original meaning of words. The etymology of ‘alternative’ means ‘offering one or the other of two.’ If most schools focus on ‘the outer’, bringing ‘the inner’ into the picture is indeed a more complete and *whole* approach to education. As such, the relationship between ‘the outer’ and ‘the inner’ becomes particularly important. However, K’s emphasis is not so much on ‘the inner’ as an object to be known, but on *ending conditioning*. Cultivating knowledge matters, of course, yet bringing about “freedom from the known” is what is at stake and that is, once again, *the* alternative at issue. Elsewhere K poses the question directly:

“Can this be done in this school: cultivate knowledge and at the same time bring about freedom from knowledge?”⁶

2. Questioning the Self as it Manifests in the Known

I understand that varied conceptions of ‘holistic education’ includes the cultivation of ‘inner’ traits, but as far as I can see, they are not explicitly about *ending the self*. Often enough, they are about doing quite the opposite. Think of all the ‘alternative’ approaches that go by the label of ‘learner-centered education’. Instead, let me paraphrase what Bill Taylor (former director of Brockwood) used to tell the staff: ‘What we want to impart to students is not self-confidence, but confidence without a self.’

By appealing to *the pedagogical relationship* between the teacher and the student, it seems K is trying to address the false distinction between ‘the one who knows’ and ‘the one who doesn’t’. This is critical because ending conditioning depends on the insight that

⁶ See *Unconditioning and Education: The need for a radical approach* (KFA 2015), Chapter 1. It was sourced from: Discussion One on Educational Centers, J. Krishnamurti in discussion in Malibu, March 8, 1974.

when it comes to the revolutionary psychic *learning* in question, attachment to ‘the known’ comes in the way. Indeed, inasmuch as “truth is a pathless land”, it seems nevertheless that it is via a relationship that values or demonstrates an appreciation for *the unknown* that Truth may be affirmed. Krishnamurti goes on to say:

“A school is a place where one learns the importance of knowledge and its limitations. It is a place where one learns to observe the world not from any particular point of view or conclusion. One learns to look at the whole of man’s endeavour, his search for beauty, his search for truth and for a way of living without conflict. Conflict is the very essence of violence. So far education has not been concerned with this, but in this school our intent is to understand actuality and its action without any preconceived ideals, theories or belief which bring about a contradictory attitude toward existence.”

What seems to be meant by ‘whole’ here is the profound questioning of the separation between *the observer and the observed*. So that it is the observer, the thinker, the person who thinks he or she knows that is in part being questioned. Most ‘alternative’ education gives credence to some version of ‘experiential knowledge’—that knowledge should come from experience rather than be intellectually digested. K too is after a type of intelligence distinct from the intellect, but his endeavor, however, is to challenge the notions of *both* an ‘experiencer’ and of ‘knowledge’. Indeed, it is essential to clarify at this juncture that questioning the separation between the observer and the observed implies not only questioning the knower but the known as well. For the illusionary hierarchy between the observer and the observed is perhaps best cleared by the affirmation of the coincidence of their respective w(hole).

As we just saw, Krishnamurti points out that “So far education has not been concerned with this.” Is he wrong? I see no evidence that

outside the K schools there are other educational institutions explicitly dedicated to a mission of “freedom from the known.” Some educationalists like Eleanor Duckworth (of Harvard University) may seem to come close. In fact her work even garnered interest at Brockwood. She came for a staff training a few years ago to speak of what she calls “the virtues of not knowing”. She differentiates such a virtue from the automatic acquisition of information and knowing the right answer. Yet even here we don’t find an explicit intention to be free of conditioning. If K is wrong and there are other schools that have this vision, then perhaps they should all join forces. For it seems today more than ever, as he himself said many years ago already, “the world is on fire.”

“The school is concerned with freedom and order. Freedom is not the expression of one’s own desire, choice or self-interest. That inevitably leads to disorder. Freedom of choice is not freedom, though it may appear so; nor is order conformity or imitation. Order can only come with the insight that to choose is itself the denial of freedom.”

Here we find what is perhaps the most counter-intuitive and controversial, but also the most significant affirmation in this statement. Namely “that to choose is itself the denial of freedom.” This gets to the core of the ‘psychological revolution’ K is after. Choosing takes place from knowledge, whereas the *freedom* K is talking about is *from* that very same knowledge. And what kind of order comes out of this freedom? I would say that such order is not the idealized ‘whole’ we find in ‘holistic education’ because such ‘w(hole)ness’ cannot be *known*. Yet, crucially, as we’ll see the point is that it *can* be thought, even if it is most often not. And that this thinking is the creative selfless experience of an *Other order*. Thinking at this stage becomes in part thinking the failure of thought itself to think.

K's notion of freedom indirectly questions today's increasing understanding of education as a commercial product to choose from the seemingly ever expanding global market. K Schools are not immune to this predicament. Though, arguably the way the schools in the West and the schools in India are having to deal with it is diametrically opposed. The point, however, is that from the perspective of respecting *The Teachings* opposites coincide. Indeed, it seems both sides have to make sure they are imbued with K's pedagogy but for obverse reasons. Inasmuch as they have to figure out where they fit in on the rich marketplace of 'progressive' educational institutions, K schools in the West (Brockwood and Oak Grove) are having to resist the temptation to reduce 'wholeness' to a marketable commodity that competes with what is on offer at other 'alternative schools'. To the extent that the K schools in India are largely elite places they may not have to contend for students, but they are not any less exposed to the danger of watering down K's message precisely because of their relative success. Either way, then, given that *all* K Schools need to stay true to their roots it seems we should double down on what seems to be a rather unique mission. As such, it is fitting that the penultimate paragraph of the educational statement, and also the last one for us to consider reads as follows:

"In school one learns the importance of relationship which is not based on attachment and possession. It is here one can learn about the movement of thought, love and death, for all this is our life. From the ancient of times, man has sought something beyond the materialistic world, something immeasurable, something sacred. It is the intent of this school to inquire into this possibility."

We are back to the affirmation of something beyond knowledge. This reminds me of a conversation I had with Mary Zimbalist (who was K's personal assistant for the last 25 years of his life) when I was a student at Brockwood. She and I used to have tea

regularly to talk about Krishnamurti as she practiced her French with me, and encouraged me to respond as much as I could with the little English I knew at the time. I remember her telling me something at first surprising K had told her about the responsibility of the educators. Paraphrasing: *“The responsibility of the teachers is not to the students but to the Other.”* My sense is that ‘the Other’ is ‘the unknown.’ Is this ‘Other’ also the ‘(w)hole’?

Thinking ‘wholeness’ isn’t easy. Crucially, for Bohm ‘the whole’ was *not*, as David Peat put it in his biography, *“that monolithic authoritarian wholeness of universal law and ultimate theory, but a wholeness that was subtle and moving,”* (p. 303). Just like it was for Bohm at his best, this promising notion cannot become in any way rigid for us educators either. Yet Bohm himself appears to have struggled to keep his thinking of it aligned with ‘the unknown’, particularly perhaps when he suffered from depression. Peat points out his obsession with order in those times. He adds that *“it was as if Bohm had a personal need to reject any intimation of chance and the unknown”* (p. 301). I want to suggest that while they should absolutely not be conceived as totally unrelated, regardless of whether we share any of his personal psychological challenges, in many ways Bohm’s *struggle* in quantum physics mirrors ours today. Our pressing question is whether we can emphasize in our pedagogy the “subtle and moving” *unknown* of the ‘(w)hole’ rather than indulge in the ideal of it.

3. The Whole or the Hole?

The word ‘holism’—sometimes spelled ‘wholism’—is a recent invention (1926) that, even though it has thankfully taken a life of its own since its inception, we should fully consider its suspicious origin. Namely the fact that it was coined by a South African statesman, Jan Smuts, who was clearly prejudiced. He was indeed a vocal supporter of the segregation of races in his country. For him

‘holistic’ essentially meant the division of the population in terms of superior and inferior ‘wholes’! This is what happens when the conception of *a whole* idealizes it, thereby fragmenting something that is fundamentally *indivisible*. When this happens the experience of the *(w)hole*—the appreciation for *the Other* (indeed for the *otherness* of others)—namely the non-idealized whole is tragically being lost from cognition.

Today the term ‘wholism’ has come to mean more accurately that *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*. I want to suggest that this is because ‘wholeness’ *here* stands for something *unknown*. And yet it is all too easily reified so that, for instance, the whole becomes an ideal of some totality or another. To the extent that ‘holistic’ refers to *any* idealized collection, it indicates a desire to capture ‘wholeness’ within the *already* ‘known’. We are then back into the dangerous business of the self. But to the extent that ‘holistic’—‘w(hole)istic’!—means precisely *poking holes* in knowledge, questioning the self that is attached to *assumed* forms and content of it, then I *think* we are closer to the ‘Other’ that K had been after for his schools.

I coined and play with the neologism ‘w(hole)istic’ to bring attention to the actually *fragile* inner core of the notions of *holism* and *whole* as a way to challenge any idealistic reading of them.⁷ For the *holy*, the sacred, is not to be encountered in the idealization of the whole. Because then it is reduced to the known, a ‘whole’ that has forgotten that it contains an unknown part: *there is a hole in the whole*. And the *hole* is the inherent part that any supposed ‘whole’ is afraid of despite—or precisely because—it is built around it. The

⁷ The hole *within* the whole, namely within the supposedly knowable, is what is to be thought. There is no ideal whole *outside* of the known. Therefore what I call the ‘w(h)ole’ or the ‘(w)hole’ or even the ‘w(hole)’ is neither a self-sufficient structure that exists independently of ‘the hole’, nor an immeasurable void. Let us say for now that the ‘(w)hole’ is the known in a modality of knowing whose aim isn’t simply *to know* but *to think*. And that it is only inasmuch as this distinction is activated that *the unknown can be thought*.

point, then, is to think the whole critically so that the hole—*the unknown*—appears and becomes the new basis for thinking. *That* constitutes a revolution in thought and K was arguably a master of it.

It seems, then, that more important than the name Krishnamurti might have called his schools, is the extent to which the ‘psychological revolution’ in question is taking place. I personally do not believe a single name will do—except maybe for the matter-of-fact name of ‘Krishnamurti Schools’—and, as K himself put it to Mary Zimbalist, only three years after the beginning of Brockwood:

*“The point of all this is to keep the teachings fundamentally and vitally in the schools. If the schools don’t vitally reflect the teachings, they are better cut loose.”*⁸

4. Measuring the Immeasurable

One of the urgent questions thus becomes that of determining whether and to what extent K schools “vitally reflect” *The Teachings*. I attempt to give the beginning of an answer by way of responding to Friedrich Grohe’s question that he asked me when it was proclaimed that K schools have never lived up to K’s teachings.⁹ Indeed, as he sought to come up with an appropriate response, he asked me and others a follow-up question to the one that had started the online dialogue. Mine was:

“Can you help me explain what is so special about being a student at Brockwood Park?”

⁸ *In the Presence of Krishnamurti: Mary Zimbalist’s Unfinished Book*, in the entry for 1 October 1972.

⁹ See Suprabha Seshan’s contribution in the 2020 issue of *Friedrich’s Newsletter*.

It seems the question of the ‘psychological revolution’ must be directly linked to what makes a ‘K education’ special, if indeed it is so. For we cannot take it for granted and instead we must pose the question and keep it alive. Otherwise what we tend to get are watered down answers that may be personally meaningful or at least satisfactory to some, but that as such might lose sight of what is potentially universal in K’s pedagogy. As such, some of the positive answers I have heard over the years include notions such as ‘some quality that appears in students’ and ‘the permission to be yourself’.

While, given the state of confusion around the issue, we probably need to begin at that level, ultimately it seems we need to transcend the personal and see whether there’s something that is not just particular to any given individual but something that links us all. That is why I believe that in spite of the arguably shortsightedness of the accusations, they nevertheless raise an important question about ‘how to assess’ what takes place in these schools beyond varying degrees of academic excellence. For the question of the practice of *The Teachings* is much bigger than what happens in the classroom.

As I see it, our issue is triple. First, that of defining what encouraging a ‘psychological revolution’ looks like. Second, that of evaluating its relative presence or absence in respective K schools. Given the disagreements on this point in particular, the question of ‘measurement’ appears to be a particularly burning one. And so third, the more practical question becomes how we would even begin to go after measuring something that seems in many ways ‘immeasurable’ if not even ‘undefinable’. At the same time, however, giving up on this question is not a serious option. For doing so means we are ready to settle for ‘some quality’, which leaves us vulnerable to the kind of ‘attacks’ we’ve already mentioned.

My sense is that there is a unifying answer to these three interrelated issues. It materialized for me with what was indeed “so special about being a student at Brockwood.” Namely, what was sometimes called when I was there *the art of questioning*. ‘To question’ is a deceptively simple notion for all that is actually at work behind the scene of *liberation from the known*. Let’s call it also, then, an ‘enquiring ethos’ which we must approach further in order to hopefully give some clarity as to how to *define, encourage, and measure* the investigative and revolutionary spirit that is at stake. As such, it seems we must question some of the key assumptions made on either side of the spectrum of responses to K schools: the accusation that they have never lived up to *The Teachings*, as well as the defences put forward.

In the K world, for instance, when we hear negative statements about his schools like: ‘the self is still very much active in K schools’ or ‘I see no freedom from the known’ etc., we may be tempted to ask ‘who is the “I” that sees no freedom?’ Or perhaps ‘Who is the supposed ‘knower’ or ‘observer’ who can judge?’ True enough when someone assumes the role of passing such a judgment, it means that they indulge in the dubious thinking that *the psychological revolution* is something that can be known rather than critically engaged in. *But* we also have to make sure we do not fall prey to the very *uncriticality* we thought we were unmasking by calling out those who question the schools. Yes, “the observer is the observed” *but* lest we turn K’s insight into a static proclamation it seems we must question whether it is *ultimately* a statement about psychological projection.

In this context, applying the critical K wisdom that *the observer is the observed* as a way to tackle criticism may be tempting. I have seen it used in this way time and again in dialogues as an unfortunate way to silence the budding questioning. The use of

this affirmation then becomes a dismissive and reductive catchphrase. Indeed, judging what somebody has said as issuing from the projections of ‘an observer’ and thus rendering it supposedly dismissible is to proceed all too quickly. The problem, it seems, is that by doing so we inadvertently reproduce the very division between *the observer and the observed* that this insightful phrase is supposed to question. The point, precisely, is not to judge but to *question*.

5. Beyond Projection: “The Observer is the Observed”

Is it simply that most fall victim to uncritically projecting their own unchecked opinions? Even if it is too often the case, it surely is true that it would be so for both sides. For couldn’t we say that when we have a favorable, perhaps somewhat naive view of what goes on in these schools, we are just as ‘guilty’ *observers/knowers*—but on the other end of the spectrum? What seems to be critical to realize about each side, then, is not so much the fact that they are both projecting, but that as they do so, they are both *not* engaging in the *questioning of the observer*. To do so, it is critical to clarify once more that if one of the observer’s main beliefs is always materialized in the belief of a ‘whole’, given that a whole is built around a *hole*, affirming the latter can be powerful in deconstructing the self. For doing so pulls away the very rug on which it stands.

Our focus, therefore, cannot be in the comfort we might find in (mis)using this powerful phrase, but instead in the less enjoyable experience of the insight that *freedom from the known* can only be a *questioning* activity; it cannot be directly stated. For the moment it is, we are back in the known and not free at all. It is like someone claiming to be enlightened—it always rings fake. K himself would arguably never have made such a statement. The truth that “the observer is the observed” is thus *not* to be cited with an ulterior

motive but is itself to be questioned if we're ever to reach *existentially* what it appears to be pointing at.

The critical idea in *the observer is the observed* insight, then, seems to be the questioning of the observer as a self who indulges in the illusion of knowing something that can't be known in the traditional sense of the word. The point is not, therefore, about *judging* someone's 'projections'—lest we adopt a stance of superiority that creates further division—but to question that very process of separation. To do so, it is potentially helpful in the phrase “the observer is the observed” to read the copula *is* the other way. Meaning that if ‘is’ amounts in many ways to ‘=’, then we should be able to affirm just as much that ‘the observed *is* the observer.’

This is a strategy I am borrowing from the nineteenth century Germanic philosopher Friedrich Hegel. His *Science of Logic* profoundly influenced Bohm for whom also the phrase in question (“the observer is the observed”) very much sounded like his own thinking on the role of the observer in quantum theory. The point that needs to be emphasized, however, is that when we begin with *the observed*, the distance, psychologically speaking, is *questioned at once* by such a (re-)formulation. Indeed, it facilitates the exposure of the constitutive cracks of the self-centered system that typically indulges in the fantasy of being *a separate whole*. Instead, when it is existentially realized that *the observed is the observer*, there is no more escape for the self to pretend it is not fundamentally the *w(hole)* it is observing. The observer, then, turns out to be inextricably linked to the observed. But *not* simply as a ‘projector’ of some constructed reality or another, but as an entity that ‘mirrors’ *the unknown* that is inherent to each. In K’s own words:

“So, is the observer, the ‘I’, separate from the thing it observes, from the ‘I’ which says, ‘I am different from the thing which I

want to get rid of'. Right? Are there two separate entities—the observer different from the thing observed? Or only one thing? The observed is the observer and the observer is the observed.”¹⁰

K does not often reverse “the observer is the observed” as he does here. Yet it seems there is promise in pursuing that practice. Indeed, it bears repeating that it is not *ultimately* that the observer projects onto the observed, but again that *finally* what is observed and the observer are part and parcel of the same w(hole). As such, they become ~~one~~ only once their respective ‘hole’ is perceived *actually* to coincide. It is, after all, because (the observed) reality is *unfinished*—there is a gap in it—that projecting is even possible. And it is this infinite—*unknown*—aspect of *the Real* ‘beyond’ any constructed representation of it that is at stake.

Beginning with the observed, then, may help the observer question *not only* its self-sufficiency so that it loses its sense of separation from what it is observing, but it all eventually hinges on the observer’s ability to reckon with the (w)hole in the observed itself. For the distance between the observer and the observed isn’t *wholly* questioned until ‘reality’ ceases to be idealized: neither elevated nor reduced *but* appreciated as constructed and thus subject to deconstruction. It is at this precise point that we may begin the additional and urgent task of *thinking the unknown*.

It is important to clarify that such thinking is intent on setting up *a true encounter* between the known and the unknown. It is absolutely not about repudiating the former. But it *is* about ensuring that the thinker doesn’t fall into the trap of thinking exclusively in terms of it. Typically the unknown is reductively translated into the *already* known, instead it is essential that the unknown *affects* the known. As long as there is a belief in an

¹⁰ *Third Public Talk In Saanen*, 11 July 1968.

observed (reality) to be ‘known’ as a selfsame whole, not only does the illusion of a self-assured knower persist, but the unknown is dangerously lost from view. As ‘the unknown’ gains visibility, the issue of projection thus becomes secondary and that of the cognition of *the unconditioned* primary.

6. Coming together to question

With that in mind, it seems that regardless of whether we agree that the ‘psychological revolution’ in question has taken place or is currently happening in these schools is in effect beside the point. *Instead* we must come together *to ask* about the role ‘K educators’ have to potentially bring it about. Similarly, when it comes to the all-important parallel question of *measuring* it, we must ask whether we are *truly* asking. Indeed, we need to make sure we are engaging with the unknown that the question raises. And if we catch ourselves having resorted to judging—projecting—at a distance, the question is whether we can look at this with the quality of attention of “the observed is the observer”.

Interestingly the root meaning of the word ‘measure’ does not mean what is usually thought of by the term: ‘to divide and compare’. Rather, it means ‘to exercise moderation’. Hence the use of the following English phrase when, for instance, an attitude or action is deemed ‘fair’, ‘noble’ or ‘dignified’: it is seen as ‘being measured’. This notion even has a kinship with the word *meditation* that is based on the Latin root ‘med’ which means ‘to measure’. Meaning that if we are to measure properly we can’t jump to conclusions and must instead bring a certain meditative quality to our approach. Do the criticisms of K schools in question do just that? Some definitely do. Either way, we may want to see in their words—as I *choose* to do here—the deeper questions that they more or less indirectly pose.

In that spirit, it seems that the ‘questioning’ activity *is* the beginning, the middle and the end (as an *immediate* ‘goal’) of the ‘psychological revolution’. For here, as K might have put it “the first step is the last step”. *To question* seems, indeed, to be what he used to call also “the first and the last freedom”. That is what I found at Brockwood. An environment in which *questioning the self* was the stated ethos. That is ultimately what motivated me to come to Brockwood as a student. For one can question on one’s own only to a certain extent. It is essential to learn to question with others, not only to check the validity of one’s questions, but because K was so right to talk about “the mirror of relationship”—it brings life and a sense of urgency to ‘your’ questions. My experience of the extent to which *questioning* was alive depended on the inquiring intensity teachers and I were able to forge. I appear to have been more fortunate than others in that respect. Though it seems clear that my keen interest in *The Teachings* prior to coming to Brockwood had something to do with it. As such, one of the questions that continues to emerge is that of how active must the role of the teacher in facilitating the revolution be. It is worth repeating how K puts it in the educational statement:

“In this school it is the responsibility of the teacher to sustain with the student a careful exploration into the implications of conditioning and thus end it.”

This “exploration” appears to be synonymous with a certain *act* of questioning. Perhaps, then, questioning ‘conditioning’ *is* ending it? For indeed, it’s not questioning for questioning’s sake, but questioning *the self* and the many ways it gets externalized. So that ending it begins and ends with a practice of *suspending* it. Most importantly this questioning practice must include questioning K, which remarkably enough he himself encouraged. For is it not when we do so that *The Teachings* come alive much more authentically than they do otherwise? That invitation to explore is

why I came back as a teacher and what today continues to motivate in large part the writing of my dissertation which focuses on what I have already called above ‘thinking the unknown’.

7. Revolution begins in thought, after all...

It seems clear that a ‘psychological revolution’ consists in questioning ‘the known’ so that ‘w(hole)ness’—the unknown—may even begin to come into view. And while ‘the whole’ may be in many ways *unknowable*, that does not mean that it can’t be *thought*. K himself changed his usage of the words ‘thought’ and ‘thinking’. It is critical to note that he became rather dismissive of these words later in his life, but early and middle K, as in 1948 for example, often talked about a “revolution in thought” and even of “true thinking”:

“For a few minutes, while you are pressed into a corner at this meeting, you may see the significance of all this. But afterwards you will slip back into your daily routine, you will go back to your teaching and professions, because you have to earn money. So, there will be very few who are serious. But it is those of you who are serious that will bring about a revolution in thought. Sir, revolution must begin in thought, not in blood; and if there is right revolution in thought, there will be no blood. But if there is no right thinking, no true thinking, there will be blood, more and more of it. The wrong means can never produce the right end, because the end is in the means.”¹¹

It seems the words ‘thought’ and ‘thinking’ become later on in K’s work a shorthand for problematic *attachments* or *conditioning*. One of the dangers here is that, as students of K’s *teachings*, we become attached to the one-sided notion that *all* thought is problematic in

¹¹ 9th Public Talk, Bombay, March 13, 1948. Many thanks to Gurvinder Singh who not only was the initial inspiration for this augmented version, but who also provided me with this quote.

what K refers to as “the psychological realm”. Yes, most thinking is memory-based, it is grounded in what the intellect already knows and becomes attached to, but is that true of *all* thought? As we’ve already seen, K himself did not always think so. Is some *thinking*, then, potentially new—indeed ‘right’; ‘true’; even *revolutionary*—because it comes from ‘the unknown’? Is thinking from a place that is not attached to memories or experiences possible? It seems this realm of ‘the unknown’ (of “freedom from the known”) is where pure potential exists—perhaps Bohm’s “infinite potential”—so that we may truly think—that is: *question*.

Maybe the most critical question here is whether *thought* can, as it were, look at itself in the mirror and *think* beyond itself. An extensive search in the KTXT database clearly reveals that K is inconsistent on this subject. He sometimes answers in the positive with great force, but he just as often answers in the negative, being rather dismissive of *all* thought.¹² Based on his longstanding collaboration¹³ with Krishnamurti, Bohm too noticed that he tended to devalue all thought, yet sometimes affirming that there is another kind of thinking, but never being very clear about it.¹⁴ So it seems we should really *question* K on this. I imagine that K himself would have encouraged us to do so.

In this spirit, the fact that K is inconsistent may be a critique, but it is a more favorable and more promising one than it may at first appear. As such it is far from being a wholesale dismissal. Quite the

¹² One can find multiple K quotes confirming this ambiguity at work within his thinking. I personally noted 24 pages of them.

¹³ They met regularly between 1965 and 1984. K died in 1986 and so Bohm’s impressions were those of the later Krishnamurti.

¹⁴ For a clear statement of this sentiment by Bohm, see for instance the extensive Maurice Wilkins interviews of him in 1986, particularly Session XI. See also *The Limits of Thought* (1999) which is a collection of 1975 and 1980 dialogues between K and Bohm. There they raise the question of the end of the kind of limitations the title alludes to. They not only leaving that possibility open but insist on it, albeit with other terms like *perception, intelligence, truth and love*.

contrary, we might say that in many instances K being *consistently inconsistent* shows him to be *questioning* live and not simply repeating what he's already said before. Particularly in his later years, however, it is striking that Krishnamurti's originally favorable appeal to the terms *thought* and *thinking* reversed almost completely. Inasmuch as this was the case it seems they arguably became problematic blind spots of his own questioning efforts. At least on the surface, for it seems clear the profound insights he was trying to convey, often via direct questions to us, remained unchanged by that reversal. And so while we cannot speak in his name, it seems nevertheless up to us to keep the spirit of questioning alive. Yes, K was human, and yet he was the kind of individual who had the honesty and foresight to tell us that: "You must become liberated not because of me but in spite of me."¹⁵

8. The Silence of the Question

The discussion about the relative success of K Schools to live by its intentions continued in the 2021 issue of *Friedrich's Newsletter*. It went further in its exploration of the disapproving bend, in particular when it considered¹⁶ the much-discussed article published in The India Forum: *Silences of Jiddu Krishnamurti* (2021) by TM Krishna. The sentiments expressed there are supposed to buttress the critical view on K Schools. Not, this time, by finding faults in the individuals in the schools who are supposedly failing at living *The Teachings*, but by finding them in K the individual himself.

¹⁵ Lutyens, Mary. *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1975), p. 248. It is telling that in the same passage K also says: "I wish I could invent a new language but as I cannot I would like to destroy your old phraseology and conceptions." We are thus in some sense doing to him what he does to us.

¹⁶ This was encouraged once more by Suprabha Seshan.

Those ‘silences’ are presumably referring to important things K is assumed not to have talked about. The problem is taken to be in part that he didn’t share much about himself. More importantly, the charge is that K didn’t address social issues, and as such didn’t give actual answers to actual problems, adopting instead a *psychological* approach that asked questions without providing definitive answers. What if, however, the fact that in many ways K transcended—*not* ignored—the socio-personal in that he consistently refused to give opinions about it *was* the beauty of what is promising in his approach? That this is largely how he was able to compellingly draw the universal out of both the personal and the social: “we are the world.”

Despite the title of his critical piece, therefore, Mr. TMK would appear to have missed the most important silence surrounding K’s work and life. The very silence *from* which and *for* which he arguably spoke: precisely that of *an inner revolution* that can and *does* change the very *outer* (the socio-personal) that he says is missing in K’s work. It is precisely *because* K resists thinking at the level of particular conceptions of age-old social problems that he can effectively expose the typically assumed separation between the personal (the observer) and the social (the observed).

The outer is thus not missing, it is rather profoundly considered in its birthplace: the inner. *For the outer is a reflection of the inner*. The critical point being that the opposite is *not* necessarily the case. At play is the question of the free thinker, who is potentially so inasmuch as it has shed its particular opinions—*its uncritical belief in the known*—and who can cultivate freedom socially only as such. The liberated *psyche* is the place where the very activism TMK says he is after has a chance to be sparked, to find the truth, the fidelity and the depth of character to make a real difference. The author also mentions a non-religious type of ‘faith’, but isn’t K’s *silence* of

the religious mind precisely already anticipating, once more, what TMK says is lacking in *The Teachings*?

To conclude, then, let us ask again to what extent is ‘questioning’ taking place in K schools? That is *the* question. It is the question that can guide us and help us gauge where ‘the psychological revolution’ is at in each of these places. Practicing what we’ve learned, it is important that we ask that question *not* as outside observers but as active members of the worldwide K community. This is a question that should be asked again and again and not simply answered by ‘unmeasured’ *statements*. My sense is that as long as we’re *really* asking that question—which implies experiencing *the silence of it*—we are engaging with the *unknown*, the ‘(w)hole’, the ‘Other’.

As such, the revolution is happening, and the extent to which that is true depends on the intensity of the questioning at work in each of these places. It is really a question that each school must ask of itself, but it starts with each of us, of course, lest we perpetuate a double standard between the observer (us) *and* the observed (them—the schools). Questioning is, it seems, our individual responsibility to keep *The Teachings* alive. ‘All’ we have to do is make sure we genuinely keep asking ‘the question of the question.’ And if we’re not, then ask why we are instead tempted to judge prematurely, betraying a fear to ask the deceptively simple question: *why not?*

TMK ends the response he wrote to all the comments he received to his article saying that ‘some bridges between the abstract [the inner] and the material [the outer] need to be built.’ The 2021 issue of *Friedrich’s Newsletter* generously assesses the situation saying that ‘it would seem that this bridge-building is far from over’. While that sentiment is evidently true, the point however, is that the very authenticity and effectiveness of the bridge being constructed

depends on a *psychological revolution*. Namely, it depends on the so-called ‘abstract’, which is in truth the most concrete thing there is. What if it is staring us in the face but it has become blindingly familiar? The insistent demand to act and focus on ‘the social’ belies a dangerous fear *to think* what gave birth to it in the first place and, by implication, what can either truly change it or replicate its status quo. Our revolution *will begin in thought*—the questioning kind—or there will be none.